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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to investigate stereotypes in college students and the relationship between traditional sex-role values and self-concepts. Students in Women's Studies and non-Woman's Studies classes were utilized as subjects to allow for a sample of potentially less traditional women. Questionnaires consisting of seven incomplete sentences were administered. Responses were coded according to affect implicit in the response, mention of the sex of the person in the response, and the category of responses. Results indicated little evidence for overt stereotyping, however, men are still preferred more than women as favorite people. More value is currently being placed on traditionally feminine emotional traits, resulting in a more positive view of women by both sexes than in previous studies. Results were compared with earlier studies, and differences resulting from varying methodologies and societal change in values discussed. It was suggested that less future stereotypic thinking will be evident as people raise their self-esteem. (Author/BW)

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Changing Self Images and Sex-Role Stereotypes in College Women

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A number of studies over the past decade and a half have documented the existence of commonly held sex-role stereotypes in teenagers and adults in our society (e.g., Broverman, et. al.,1972; Burhenne, 1972; Lunneborg, 1970, McKee and Sherriffs, 1957). According to these studies, men are more aggressive, independent, objective, active, competitive, logical, worldly, skilled in business self-confident and ambitious as well as being blunt, rough, loud, not at all talkative, sloppy and not able to express tender feelings. Women, according to the stereotypes, are the opposite of these 'masculine' traits. They are not aggressive, not independent, not objective, very passive, not at all competitive, very illogical, not worldly, not skilled in business, not self-confident and not ambitious-- while also being tactful, gentle, quiet, talkative, neat in habits and easily able to express tender feelings (Broverman, et. al., 1972). These stereotypic beliefs about the natures of men and women are held by both sexes. Recent studies (for example, see those reviewed in Broverman, et. al., 1972) suggest that these stereotypes are not changing and that even college students believe in the stereotypes and rate stereotypic behavior as the preferred behavior for both sexes.

A particularly negative implication of these stereotypes is the general devaluing of women and women's roles which seems inherent in the stereotyping process. Stereotyping, in genreral, leads to a negative evaluation of certain groups. In the case of sex-role stereotypes, although some female stereotypes are positive, the majority of them have been viewed negatively by both men and women. Rosenkrantz, et. al. (1968) found that many of the traits rated in their studies as more typical of men than women formed what they labled as a competency

cluster. This means that men were seen as generally more competent and able to deal with the world while women were seen as relatively incompetent. This is obviously a negative stereotype, especially for a woman who wants to be perceived as competent. In the same study, females were valued for possessing traits of warmth and expressiveness while men were seen as low on these emotional traits. Thus, men were more valued for some traits while women were more valued for other traits. However, there were many more of the positively valued male traits than positively valued female traits. Therefore, overall, more value was attached to the stereotypic male than to the stereotypic female. A similar pattern of devaluing female traits has been found in other studies. Sherriffs and McKee (1957) found that men were rated more positively than women. Broverman, et. al., (1970) found that male traits were labled as more psychologically healthy than female traits by practicing therapists; Burhenne (1972) replicated this with data indicating that male were rated as more healthy while female traits were more likable. Other studies have shown that women tend to rate men more positively than men rate women (MacBrayer, 1960; Turner and Turner, 1972).

This pattern of stereotyping men and women has certain implications. First, since one's self ratings tend to be similar, altough not identical, to the ratings assigned to one's own sex, female self concepts tend to be lower than male self concepts (Broverman, et. al., 1972; Sherriffs and McKee, 1957). Also, women are expected to perform more poorly than men on a number of tasks (see Frieze, in press, for a review of this literature) and articles and paintings done by women are rated less highly than those done by men (Goldberg, 1968; Pheterson, Kiesler, and Goldberg, 1971). Thus, stereotypes appear to have a general effect of causing

people to devalue women and the things women do (at least things invloving skills other than emotional warmth). These stereotypes are incorporated into the self images of women and lead to their generally lower self esteem and anxiety (see Maccoby, 1966).

Although the studies reviewed above indicate that sex-role stereotypes are not changing, these studies have followed a consistent pattern of asking subjects to rate the typical male or typical female on a number of traits. Such a methodology tends to maximize stereotypes since subjects in such a situation are being asked to generate their stereotypes even if they do not normally think in stereotypic terms (see Lunneborg, 1970, for a discussion of this issue). Other data, not relying upon direct rating scales of stereotypes, suggests that stereotypes may be changing. The consistently lower expectations for women which have been found in previous studies are not always replicating, and women no longer consistently devalue the work of other women as Goldberg's study indicated that they did (see Frieze, in press, for a review of this literature). Also, there is some indirect evidence that women's self images are becoming more positive along the competency dimension and that these changes appear to be particularly evident among women with non-traditional sex-role attitudes (Frieze, in press; Gump, 1972; Joesting, 1971).

In order to more directly investigate stereotypes in college students today and the relationship between traditional sex-role values and self concepts, a study was done at the University of Pittsburgh to explore self images and stereotypes using an open ended format. This format, which was similar to one employed by MacBrayer (1960) was utilized so that direct cueing of responses might be avoided. Students in Women Studies and non-Women Studies classes were

were used to allow for a sample of potentially less traditional women. Women Studies students were expected to be more positive about themselves and to have fewer stereotypes than non-Women Studies students. Men enrolled in Women Studies were included for comparison purposes although their number was small.

METHOD

Sample: A total of one hundred and fifty-six (156) women and twenty (20) men in Women Studies classes and eighty-three (83) women and seventy-four (74) men in other comparable classes were tested during the 1973-1974 school year.

Procedure: Questionnaires consisting of seven incomplete sentences (see Appendix) were administered during the first few weeks of class for Women Studies classes and near the beginning of the term for the non-Women Studies classes. Students were not told the purpose of the study although they may have been sensitive to the obvious stereotype items ("I believe most men..." and "I believe most women...). They were asked to complete each incomplete sentence with a brief, immediate response.

Responses were coded for the affect implicit in the response (positive, negative, or neutral), mention of the sex of the person in the response, and the catagory of response (responses were coded into stereotypic versus non-stereotypic catagories as well as assigned to one of over forty (40) specific content catagories).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Direct evidence for stereotypic thinking was obtained from the items "I believe most women..." and "I believe most men...". For these items only 20% of the women gave a stereotypic response for "I believe most women..." while 14% used male stereotypic responses to the male item. Male subjects showed a similar low use of stereotypes with 20% using female stereotypes and 17% mentioning male stereotypes. Thus, when not asked to rate particular traits for their stereotypic content, both female and male college students tended to use non-stereotypic responses in describing most women or men.

Along with the direct categorization of responses into stereotypic and non-stereotypic responses, a more subtle measure of stereotypic thinking was the affect associated with the responses describing most women and most men. Traditional stereotypes include not only a list of traits for women and for men, but they also involve a positive affect associated with male characteristics and a negative affect associated with female characteristics. When responses to the stereotype items were coded for affect, most subjects responded with a negative rather than a positive characteristic, especially for the item "I believe most men...", although these differences were not significant. Furthermore women and men were slightly more positive about women than they were about men (see Table 1). This data in combination with the stereotypic category data, then, showed no evidence for a persistence of stereotypic thinking on the part of college students. In comparison with MacBrayer (1960) who used similar methodology, college students of today were far less stereotypic in their thinking.

Although students in Women Studies classes were expected to be less stereotypic than the non-Women Studies students, these expectations were not

strongly supported by the data (see Table 2), perhaps because of the low degree of stereotypic thinking evident in the sample as a whole. There were no differences in the Women Studies and non-Women Studies women students in their use of female stereotypes to describe women but there was a nonsignificant trend for the Women Studies group to be more negative about women ($X^2 = 3.2$, $p < .10$). The groups did differ somewhat in their use of male stereotypes. Women Studies women tended to use more phrases typically considered as feminine to describe men ($X^2 = 3.9$, $p < .15$). However, they also tended to be slightly more negative overall about men than the non-Women Studies women who were evenly divided between positive, neutral and negative feelings about men ($X^2 = 3.5$, $p < .20$). Thus, the Women Studies women were more negative overall, although slightly less stereotypic than the non-Women Studies women students.

Men in Women Studies differed from the non-Women Studies men in being more rather than less stereotypic about women. ($X^2 = 6.5$, $p < .05$). They do not differ in their use of male stereotypes. In terms of affect, the Women Studies men were more polarized about women, tending to be either more positive or more negative than the non-Women Studies men ($X^2 = 3.2$, $p < .10$). The Women Studies men were clearly more negative about men in general than the non-Women Studies men ($X^2 = 4.5$, $p < .05$). Comparing men and women in Women Studies, the men were somewhat more negative than the women about men ($X^2 = 2.2$, $p < .15$) while there were no differences approaching significance for their attitudes about women.

Self Esteem

Self esteem was assessed by looking at the affect associated with the responses to the item "I feel I am...". As shown in Table 1, women were more positive about themselves than men were. Men tended to be relatively more neutral ($X^2 = 28.6$, $p < .01$). A further analysis compared the affect associated

with oneself with that associated with men and women in general. Although none of the trends reached acceptable significance, women with positive self images were more likely to use positive phrases to describe both men and women in general. Men showed the same trend; men with positive self images were slightly more likely to use positive terms to describe men and women (see Table 3)

Comparing Women Studies women and men with non-Women Studies students, the Women Studies women tended to be more negative about themselves (or less positive) than those women not in Women Studies ($X^2 = 5.1$, $p < .10$). Men in Women Studies, however, were more positive about themselves than the other men ($X^2 = 6.6$, $p < .05$). Since these trends were in the opposite direction form the sex differences in the population as a whole, the men and women in Women Studies had relatively similar self concepts, with the majority of both of their responses still being positive.

Choice of Friends

A final and more subtle aspect of stereotyping is the devaluing of women which sometimes occurs in the choice of friends. Many women report that they prefer women to men friends, or at least they have traditionally. Data obtained from the item "My favorite person is..." indicated that this pattern still holds. Many more women chose a male figure as their favorite person than men chose a female ($X^2 = 9.4$, $p < .01$). In fact, as shown in Table 4, both sexes chose men more often than women. This same trend, to a lesser degree, was found in the Women Studies sample. Here women still chose men more often, but men chose men and women equally ($X^2 = 2.4$, $p < .15$).

CONCLUSIONS

These data indicate that college students in general use few sex role stereotypes in describing men and women when not asked to rate them on a pre-established scale. Compared to MacBrayer's (1960) data which was gathered in a similar manner as the data reported here, both sexes had fewer stereotypes than fifteen years ago, which is not surprising in light of the prevalence of feminist ideas today. However, these data also suggest that certain aspects of stereotypic thinking are changing faster than others. Although people do not typically respond with traditional stereotypes overtly, there is still a tendency to prefer men over women as favorite. However, there appears to be a shifting of valuing of male and female traditional characteristics. The data reported in Broverman, et. al., (1972) suggested that achievement-oriented or competence traits are strongly valued, and, therefore, male traits overall are seen more positively since there are more of these than of the emotional expressiveness traits of women which were also valued. These data indicate that females are being viewed as positively, if not more so, than males. This is consistent iwth other recent data which also failed to find a pattern of more value being attached to masculine traits (Unger and Siiter, 1974). Furthermore, women were positive about themselves, again suggesting a change in orientation. Thus, college students of both sexes may be seeing women more positively as they are beginning to devalue traditional achievement. Such a trend is in accord with the declining achievement motivation in this country reported by McClelland (1972).

This study also looked at differences between Women Studies and non-Women Studies students with the expectation that the Women Studies group would be less stereotypic and might suggest the directions in which other changes would be

occurring. This expectation did not seem to be supported by the data. Although men in Women Studies were relatively positive about themselves, they tended to be more stereotypic about women and to be more positive and more negative in the affect they had about women, as well as being more negative about men. Thus, their stereotypes may have been changing about men, but they did not seem comfortable with women either. Perhaps this was because they were more opposed to traditional ideas of women and were looking for alternatives by enrolling in Women Studies classes. Women in Women Studies may have also been seeking alternatives to the traditional views since they were negative about women in general as well as being relatively more negative about themselves. However, the women in Women Studies were less stereotypic about men and in fact spontaneously listed more characteristics typically considered feminine as characterizing men. This indicates that the women also appear to be changing more in their views of men than women.

A final aspect of these data was the trend for people with more positive self images to be less negative in their views of either sex. This trend appears to be very hopeful and suggests that less stereotypic thinking will be evident as people raise their self esteem.

TABLE 1

Affect of Responses - Entire Sample

	"I believe most men..."			"I believe most women..."			"I feel I am..."		
	-	0	+	-	0	+	-	0	+
Female	123	67	45	102	69	65	58	59	122
Male	40	36	13	28	41	23	12	52	30

$X^2 = 28.6$
$p < .01$

TABLE 2

Affect of Responses - Women Studies Sample

	"I believe most men..."			"I believe most women..."			"I feel I am..."		
	-	0	+	-	0	+	-	0	+
Female	39	34	29	73	38	43	45	36	75
Male	12	5	1	7	5	7	4	5	10

TABLE 3

Feelings About Oneself and Feelings About Women and Men

	Women		Men	
Subjects	- or 0	+	- or 0	+
Females				
- or 0	97	29	98	18
+	33	36	91	27
Males				
- or 0	50	13	53	7
+	20	10	23	6

TABLE 4

Sex of person chosen as a favorite person

	"My favorite person is..."	
	Male	Female
All Subjects		
Male	34	25
Female	88	40
Women Studies		
Male	7	8
Female	54	26

A P P E N D I X

Codename:_____

Sex: F M

Please give your immediate, first brief response to each of the following incomplete sentences.

I feel I am...

My favorite person is...

*I believe most women...

Children always...

When I am feeling especially good, I...

*I believe most men...

I would never...

* The order of these items was randomly varied

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